

# STATEMENT OF CHAIRWOMAN LAURA RICHARDSON

Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response  
Committee on Homeland Security

## ***“Interoperable Emergency Communications: Does the National Broadband Plan Meet the Needs of First Responders?”***

July 27, 2010 at 10:00 AM  
311 Cannon House Office Building

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Today we will be discussing the National Broadband Plan’s recommendation for building a nationwide, interoperable, public safety communications network.

This broadband network would be able to:

- support the exchange of large amounts of data, including photos and video;
- allow first responders to easily communicate across agencies and jurisdictions; and
- ultimately, usher in the next generation of emergency response.

The need for a nationwide broadband network for our first responders was made abundantly clear after 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina.

In both disasters, response operations were severely hampered because public safety was unable to communicate with each other.

But, today—nearly ten years after the worst terrorist attack on U.S. soil—we are still waiting.

The FCC’s National Broadband Plan provides a strategy for reaching this goal by auctioning the 10 megahertz of spectrum known as “D-Block” to commercial interests and establishing a public/private partnership for its use.

While we know much time and effort has gone into this plan, we still have questions about whether it has the best solutions for homeland security.

The plan contends that public safety would be able to leverage commercial innovation, economies of scale, and additional spectrum via priority access and roaming agreements on commercial networks.

These are promising attributes, but the Subcommittee needs more assurances that these features will provide adequate resources and capacity for public safety to meet its mission-critical needs.

The reality on the ground for first responders requires that they have a dependable communications system that will work under the worst circumstances every single time.

We look forward to hearing from all our witnesses whether you believe the National Broadband plan would provide that dependable communications network.

Additionally, we want to know how the FCC analyzed public safety’s spectrum use and overall needs, because they have certainly made it known that they require more spectrum.

With the large number of public safety organizations opposed to the D-Block auction, we are also interested in the efforts taken by the FCC to work with public safety during development of the auction plan.

Clearly, there has been a disconnect with public safety in some respects and it must be resolved.

I believe DHS with its close interactions with the public safety community could definitely help bridge the gap.

I look forward to hearing how Assistant Secretary Schaffer's office will take steps to engage first responders and make emergency communications a larger priority at the Department.

We expect the Office of Emergency Communications at DHS and its Emergency Communications Preparedness Center to play a more prominent role in developing interoperable communications.

In addition to the Administration, we also wanted to make sure we heard directly from public safety.

We are grateful to have several representatives with us on our second panel and we appreciate your service.

We want to gain a better understanding of your proposal to reallocate the D-Block to public safety and how you intend to fund the build-out and sustainment of the network.

Whether the D-Block is auctioned or directly allocated to public safety, there must be a plan in place to pay for the system, as well as all the new hardware that must be purchased by cash-strapped localities.

Often times, rural communities have the most trouble finding resources to roll out new initiatives, so we appreciate Mr. Graham from the Rural Cellular Association being here to provide his perspective.

Ultimately, when we talk about pursuing a nationwide interoperable public safety network, no side can do it alone.

There must be a collaborative approach that leverages the expertise and resources of all involved—public safety, commercial providers, and the government.